DARK HORSE MANGA

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

89 $2.99 US

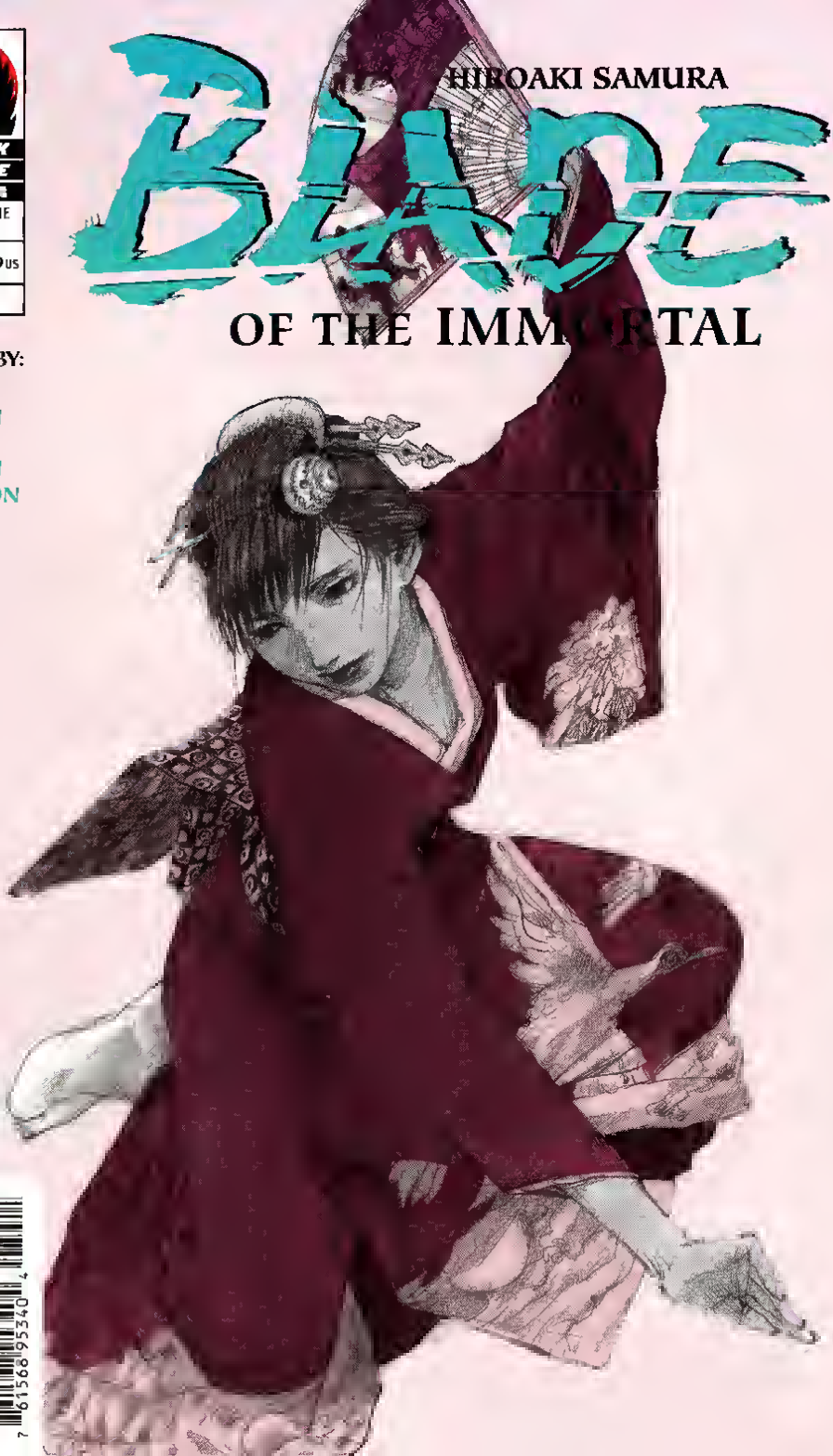
CROSSROADS ONE SHOT

PINUPS BY:

POP MHAN and JASON PEARSON

HIROAKI SAMURA

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL



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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by

DANA LEWIS and TOREN SMITH

lettering and retouch by

TOMOKO SAITO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin*

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by Ittō-*ryū*

ANOTSU
The leader of the Ittō-*ryū* sword school

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessenchu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for the 100 good people who died at his hand under his corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Two years earlier, when her parents were murdered on her fourteenth birthday by Anotsu Kagehisa's Ittō-*ryū* swordsmen, Rin Asano became part of a mad revenge cycle which began when Anotsu's grandfather was thrown out of the Asano clan's Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* fifty years before. A quest for vengeance was instilled in Anotsu, a similar quest now haunts Rin. Upon learning of Manji, she enlisted his aid to destroy the Ittō-*ryū* and avenge her parents.

After leaving Manji to complete her quest alone, Rin prevails over great hardships and comes into a strange, unsteady alliance with Anotsu in order to survive while on the run in Kaga. After assassins from Kensui's sword school attempt to kill them, Anotsu returns to his supposed friend for an explanation. Unable to deal with the fact that he was forced to betray Anotsu, Kensui commits suicide— as does Hisoka, Anotsu's new wife. Rin and Anotsu are now trying to flee Kaga, with a band of Kensui's students on their trail, stopping only when Anotsu tracks down his heart's true desire, Makie, a much-respected swordswoman who once bested Manji in battle. After saving her life and continuing on their journey, Anotsu collapses, apparently from a mysterious illness.

designer **DEBRA BAILEY** · editor **PHILIP SIMON** · publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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無限の住人

CROSSROADS

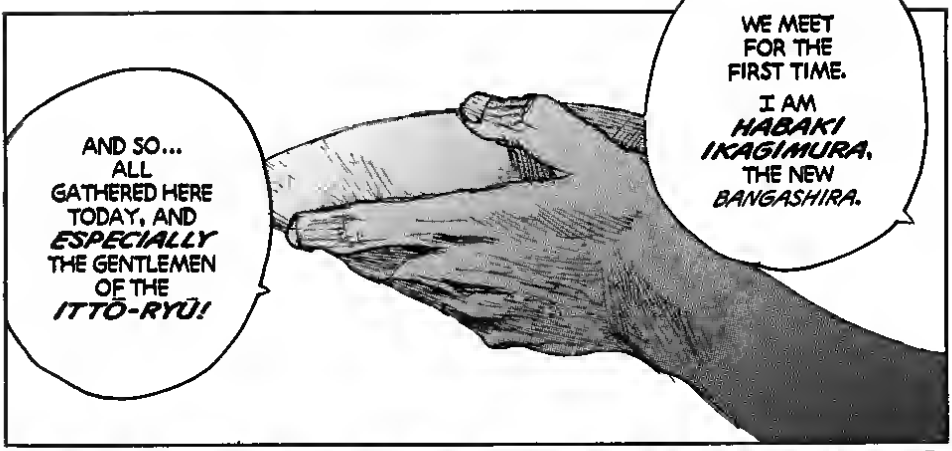
OH?!
PLEASE COME IN!
WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR...

Y... YOU...?

.....
.....!

HERE. MY SWORD.
UH... UM... YES, SIR!
OH, YEAH. MINE, TOO.

.....
HRM!
A SPLENDID SIGHT...
...ABAYAMA-DONO!
HAHAHA! HERE, HABAKI-DONO... TAKE THIS.
FOR A TOAST!
MY THANKS.


AND SO... ALL GATHERED HERE TODAY, AND *ESPECIALLY* THE GENTLEMEN OF THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ!*
WE MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME. I AM *HABAKI IKAGIMURA*, THE NEW *BANGASHIRA*.

BANGASHIRA: HEAD OF THE *BANSHŪ*.

YET IF OUR HEARTFELT LITTLE FEAST PROVIDES...
...AN OPPORTUNITY TO STOKE THE FIRES AND FLESH OF YOU WILD WARRIORS, WHAT *MORE* COULD I ASK?
DIG IN!!

ゆけ

HEY, BIG *SPEND-ER!*
NICE SPREAD!
"BIG SPENDER"...? NOT I. BUT SERIOUSLY, ABAYAMA-*DONO*...

...IS THIS REALLY ACCEPT-ABLE?
I REFER, OF COURSE, TO THE ABSENCE OF ANOTSU-*DONO*.

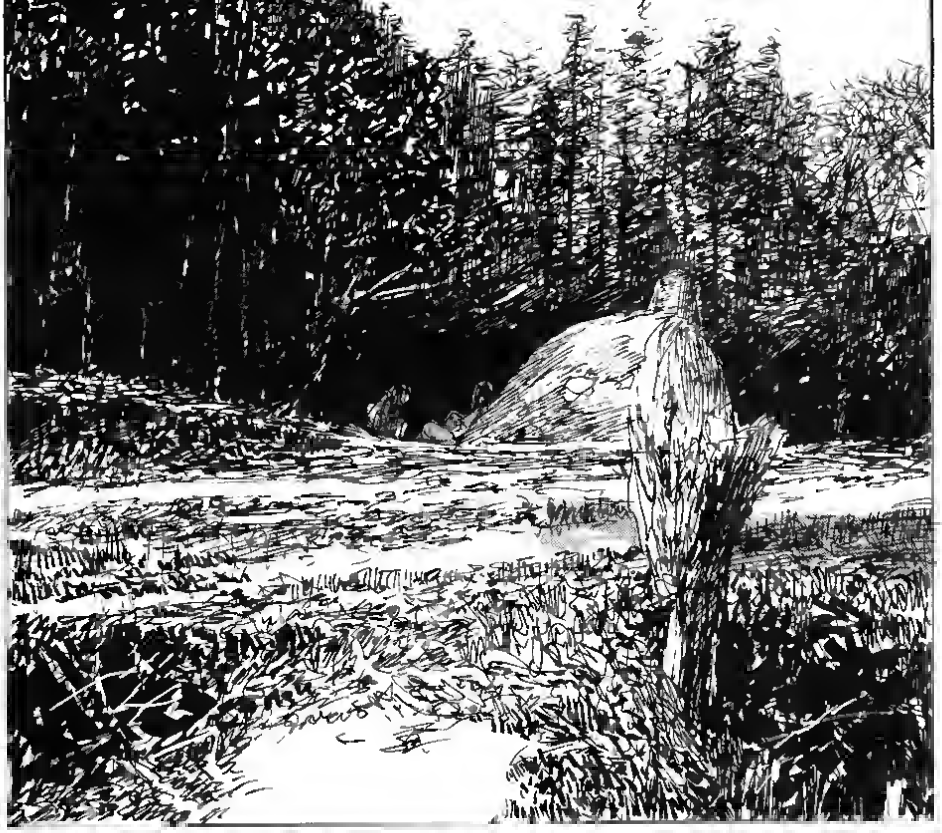
DON'T GIVE HIM ANOTHER THOUGHT, HABAKI-*DONO*.
IT'S *HIS* FAULT FOR NOT BEING BACK WHEN HE SAID HE'D BE.
YET... WE COULD HAVE RESCHEDUL-ED...
NO, NO.
WHY WASTE MORE OF YOUR BUDGET? KAGEHISA DOESN'T CARE ABOUT THINGS LIKE THIS.
I UNDER-STAND MANY HAVE DESIGNS ON ANOTSU-*DONO*'S LIFE.
PERHAPS THIS TRIP AS WELL...?
AND I HEAR YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE WENT TO CONSIDERABLE ***PAINS*** WHEN HE LEFT FOR KAGA?
YES, YES... ALL TRUE. HOWEVER...
YOU SEE, HABAKI-*DONO*... THE REASON WE CAN KICK BACK LIKE THIS AND ***ENJOY***...
...IS BECAUSE WE KNOW OUR BOSS'S ***SWORD ARM*** DESERVES ***ALL*** THE TRUST WE PUT IN IT.

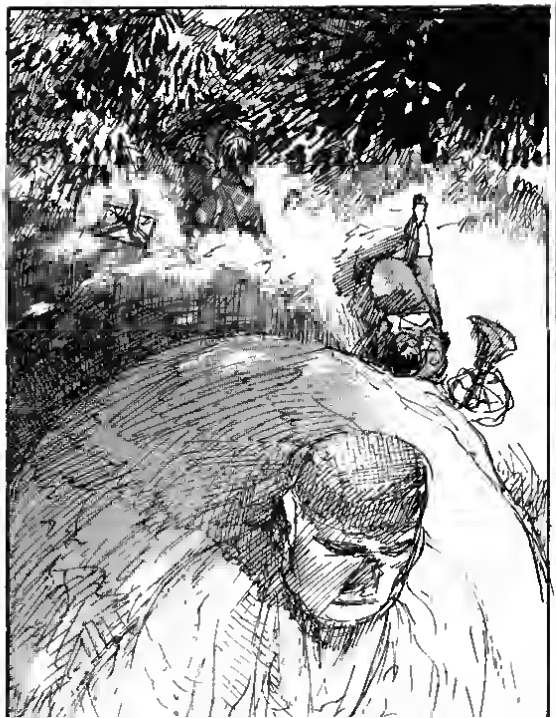
SO, YOU FEEL THERE'S NOTHING THE YOUNG GENIUS OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ CAN'T HANDLE?
NOTHING AT ALL...?
BUT GENERALLY... YES. UNLESS HE WAS SICK OR INJURED, OF COURSE.
HA HA HA!
"GENIUS" ...? TOO MUCH!
ahh
DAMN GOOD SAKE!

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. I'M ALWAYS GETTING ON OUR YOUNG'UNS CASE ABOUT THAT.
BUT I WAS PRETTY FULL OF MYSELF, TOO, WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE.
BY THE WAY... HOW OLD *ARE* YOU, HABAKI-*DONO*?
FORTY-EIGHT.
SO *YOUNG!* I'M SIXTY-FIVE.
HRMM... YES...I SEE. PERHAPS A MEASURE OF COMPLACENCY ISN'T BAD WHEN YOU'RE *YOUNG*. NO, *CERTAINLY* NOT!
YET TO STRUT ABOUT IN ARROGANCE WHEN YOUR SKILLS CAN'T BEGIN TO MATCH THOSE OF THE WARRIORS OF OLD APPEARS MERELY... *COMICAL*.
MUSH-ROOM AND FERN TIP *NUTA*.
MM... *DELI-CIOUS!* WHAT IS IT?
HA HA HA!
ANYWAY, THAT'S WHY--*HOH?* WHERE TO?
EXCUSE ME... THE BATH ROOM.

Suhewww

MAKOTO!
ON THE HOUR. EXACTLY.
TELL GIICHI.

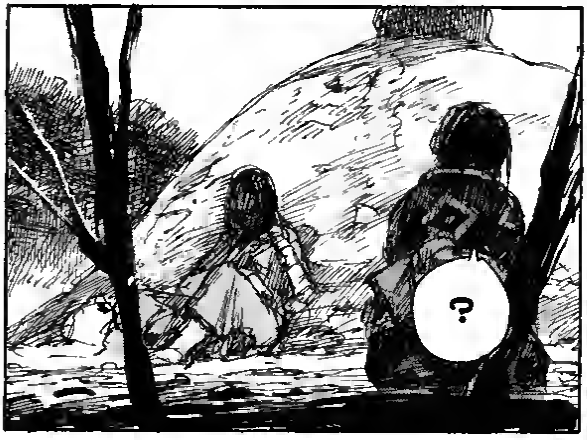




HUH... SO MUCH FOR THE GREAT LEADER OF THE ITTO-RYU
CATCHES A BUG, AND HE'S DOWN LIKE THE REST OF US.

COUPLE DAYS AGO HE COULD STILL FIGHT.
AND NOW HE CAN'T EVEN WALK WITHOUT MY HELP.

DARN IT... .....
YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO NEEDS A REST...


?

WHAT? YOU WANT ME?

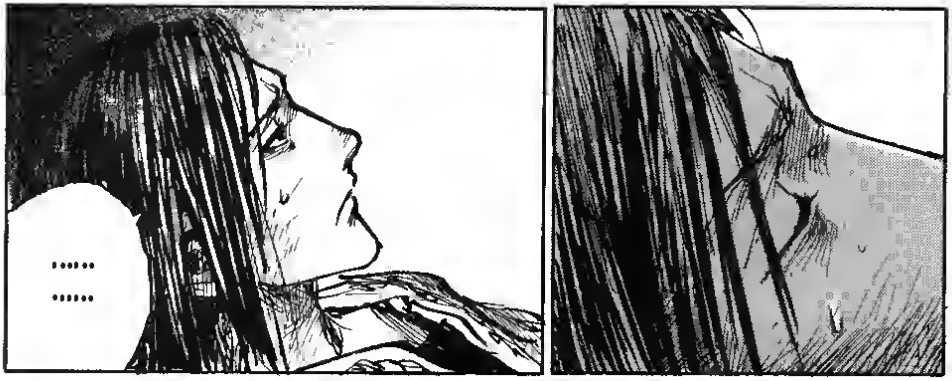
"WHY"...
"NOT"...
"WHY NOT KILL ME?"
OH. HMM... GOOD POINT.
HOW DO I PUT THIS...? MAYBE...
"I MISSED MY WINDOW OF OPPOR-TUNITY"...?
I MEAN, KILLING SOMEONE WHO CAN'T EVEN STAND UP...?
IT JUST SEEMS KIND OF SLEAZY, YOU KNOW?

.....
.....
.....?
HERE.
YOU'VE DRAGGED THAT SICK BODY OF YOURS ALL THE WAY TO *SUWA*.
YOU'VE DONE *REALLY* WELL.

BUT IT'S OVER, RIGHT? YOU'VE REACHED THE END, RIGHT? YOU'LL NEVER RECOVER FROM THAT DISEASE UNLESS YOU GET SOME DECENT FOOD AND SHELTER.
BUT WE CAN'T EVEN USE A FLOPHOUSE OR THEY'LL TRACK US DOWN.
AND YOU'LL STILL HAVE TO FIGHT THEM, SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW, BEFORE WE REACH EDO.
NOW, THIS STUFF...
...IT'S NOT MEDICINE.
IT'S BUSU.
WILL YOU WIN THIS TIME? I DON'T THINK SO. YOU CAN'T EVEN SWING YOUR AXE!

BUSU: A POISON, EXTRACT OF MONKSHOOD

FRIEND OR FOE, I THINK ANYONE WHO'S BEEN PUSHED THIS FAR...
...AT LEAST DESERVES THE CHOICE.


.....
.....

GRASP
HEH... YOU'RE HOPE-LESS...!
SO BE IT! THEN I'LL WATCH OVER YOU... TO YOUR END.
TO BE CONTINUED...

LETTERS

send letters to:

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS,
10956 SE MAIN STREET, MILWAUKIE, OREGON 97222
www.darkhorse.com • blade@darkhorse.com

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GLOSSARY

banshū: officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself

bangashira: head of the *banshū*

busu: the poisonous extract from a Monkshood plant

dono: very polite honorific, indicating much respect

Ittō-ryū: the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa

kōkenjo: sword school established by the Shogunate

nuta: a Japanese dish mixing fish or vegetables with miso, rice vinegar, sesame seeds, and other ingredients.

ryū: a sword school

Be sure to catch our next issue, featuring the reunion *Blade* readers have been waiting for...wow...since *Blade* #44! Manji and Rin? Finally together again? Check out the sweet cover to *Blade of the Immortal* #90 on the following page...guaranteed to melt even the hardest immortal heart! Also gracing this issue are bonus pinup pages from previous Japanese *Blade* collections, one-page masterpieces by Hiroaki Samura, along with brand-new pinups by *Blade* fans Pop *"SpyBoy"* Mhan and Jason *"Body Bags"* Pearson. We're also reprinting a dust jacket page from volume 11 of the Japanese editions, which reveals Samura's sillier side. First, though, kind words from a faithful reader and an inspiring image from an Australian fan.

—Philip Simon

Dear *Blade* Letters,
It's unbelievable what Samura gives us. In the most mundane of moments he is capable of an eye-catching, creative elegance that–were it not for the care he lavishes on *Blade*–would normally be considered unnecessary. A case in point is the instant Anotsu snatches the pipe from Makie (in the beginning of *Blade of the Immortal* #86). It appears both unusual and unnatural that he would have taken it into his hand as shown, but apparently Samura's creativity realized an opportunity, treating us to a strikingly graceful union between hand and pipe. There are many artists of extraordinary ability out there, but somehow, and most pleasantly, Samura's love for the previously insignificant is unique.

James Umstattd
via email

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Normally, all of our manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

Manji interpreted by Stephen Finch of Holt, Australia

NEXT MONTH:
Last Blood, Part One

It's the reunion we've all been waiting for! Sporting one of the most heart-wrenching covers *Blade of the Immortal* fans will ever see, this issue delivers both the emotional impact of Manji and Rin's much-anticipated reunion and the harrowing beginning of another Samura-style sword fight. The surviving members of the Shingyōtō-*ryū* finally find Rin and her strange companion, Anotsu. Will Rin turn against Anotsu and bargain with Iriya? The only certainty is that, if he has to, Manji will cut his way through as many revenge-hungry swordsmen as possible to get to his dear "little sister!"

The image of this stone monument is found on the back dust jacket of the Japanese *Blade of the Immortal* collection #11. This page reveals the playful side of Hiroaki Samura, a silliness that amuses our translator, Dana Lewis, and which includes Japanese pop culture references that our beloved American audience may not quite understand.

(*Dear readers,*
Izumi Masako was a popular Nikkatsu movie actress from the 50s, Yoshinaga Sayuri is a papular singer, and Takei Teashi is the pseudanymaus authar af Samura's own Ohikkoshi *manga.*

—Dana Lewis)

Afternoon Drama Guide
SUNDAY--Blade of the Immortal
8:00-9:00 p.m., AFT Network, 11 Episodes
Story & Script: Hiroaki Samura
Director: Takei Teashi
Cast: Hiroaki Samura, Izumi Masako, Yoshinaga Sayuri, Inoue Mageo, Y-Da, N-Ya, Morning Musume, Other

February 4 (Episode 10)
After slaughtering the warriors of the Watanabe-*ryû*, Manji (Samura) disappears without a trace, leaving only his enigmatic parting words, "I'm just an outcast who can't log onto the net." His incredulous editor (N-Ya) seeks out Manji's legendary first editor (Y-Da), and tries to retrace Manji's old research trips, but

February 11 (Final Episode)
In a desperate bid to stop the evil priestess (Yoshinaga) from bringing the Watanabe-*ryû* back to life, Manji's second-generation editor (Inoue) travels to her temple on Mt. Osorezan, but is shot between the eyes and dies. The prime minister is deposed, throwing the political world into chaos. Manji quietly reincarnates as a stone Buddha: "From now on, I'll work to support the tourist industry of Suwa and its environs," he murmurs. They are the words of a man who has found his way at last.

Manji and Rin
Pinup by Hiroaki Samura, from the Japanese edition of *Blade of the Immortal*, Volume 9

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Somber Geisha

Pinup by Hiroaki Samura from the Japanese edition of *Blade of the Immortal* Volume 1

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Manji!
Pinup by Pop Mhan

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Makie!
Pinup by Jason Pearson

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